

BOOK REVIEW

Forestry and Rural Development in Europe: Research Results and Policy Implications of a Comparative European Project, by B.H.M. Elands and K.F. Wiersum, Forest and Nature Conservation Policy Group, Report 2003-02, Wageningen UR, The Netherlands, ISSN 1569-1314.

This book is the product of an EU Fifth Framework project involving nine partners, including one pre-accession state, which was co-ordinated by the Dutch authors of this publication. The Multifor.RD project ran from 1999 to 2002 and at a time of growing recognition of the multifunctionality of forestry. It sought 'to assess how forestry can contribute to rural development'. This aim is later translated into a wider objective: 'to make a comparative European study about the nature and dynamics of the landowners' and public's attitudes towards forests and forestry, and at developing criteria for distinguishing regional-specific strategies for multifunctional forestry to serve rural development.'

In addition, the authors offer the project as a contribution to the development of a common methodology for comparative research in forest policy, a set of common questions on perceptions and attitudes of different stakeholder groups and a common database with prototype questions. These wide-ranging aspirations raise a high level of expectations about what the project might achieve.

The book is organised in six main chapters: the first describes the key concepts used in the book; the second describes in detail the research methodology; the third describes and characterises the research areas; the fourth presents the results of the qualitative survey; the fifth presents the quantitative results; and the final chapter presents the main findings of the study.

At the core of the book is the desire to better understand the multifunctional contribution of forestry to economic vitality, social attractiveness and ecological integrity. However, the authors frame the notion of multifunctionality not only in terms of different uses but also in terms of the different perspectives and interpretations of different stakeholders. The decline of the role of primary production and the emergence of new rural functions is noted, which frame a consideration of competing discourses and multiple definitions of rurality. The European policy context of a growing interest in rural development is flagged, which is interpreted as 'desired futures of the countryside and the process of strengthening the liveability of rural areas.' Some might quibble with this rather non-economic definition and the emphasis on ascertaining the desired future rather than understanding the actual present.

The methodology chapter describes the wider research context and outlines the specific approaches adopted in this study. The first part of the methods comprises a comparative description of two case study areas in each country, which were selected on the basis of expressing the diversity of conditions found in the countries. Where available, common descriptive parameters were defined to make a comparison. The second part of the methods comprised a phenomenology-driven

study of local representations of forestry in six of the nine countries using commonly agreed interview guidance to conduct in-depth interviews. Results were used to conduct a content analysis and then common strands were identified in relation to the main themes. This resulted in the identification of four distinct types of rural area: forestry dominated; production agricultural-dominated; rural areas exposed to urban contact; and peri-urban areas. The quality of life (i.e. the liveability of rural areas) is captured via four groups of criteria, namely community; economic; landscape; and environmental. From the results of the qualitative survey, a quantitative survey was carried out in all countries except France, the purpose of which was to question landowners and other resident stakeholders and identify any differences in respect of area or respondent characteristics.

The methodology clearly proved challenging or difficult for some countries, as it was not consistently applied. Further, response rates varied enormously between countries, and the results obtained were undoubtedly coloured by recent events (such as privatisation programmes or major storms). The research methods inevitably steer a difficult path between the desire to recognise regional specificities and a desire to scale up to national and European level. The extent to which all participants shared the vision and understanding of the co-ordinators is unclear, although a strong team spirit clearly drove forward the collective endeavour.

The description of the research areas proceeds predominantly through an examination of objective descriptive criteria, but also considers subjective interpretations. The principal descriptors were demographic, land use and economic. Ten common descriptors were used and the average conditions in each of the eight types of area were estimated. These comprised a matrix as follows. Unsurprisingly there were major differences in these variables between the cases.

Type of forest area	Rural with urban characteristics	Diversified rural	Agricultural-growing	Agricultural-declining	Remote
Traditional forest area	3 cases	2 cases	0 cases	3 cases	2 cases
Aforestation area	1 case	3 cases	2 cases	2 cases	

It is clear that such a range of cases captures the diversity of conditions in rural Europe. However, whether such cases focus specifically on where forestry is adapting well to provide new roles in rural development and where it is not is less certain.

The qualitative findings based on discourse analysis in only six countries suggest three main axes of contrast in the rural discourses: production vs landscape oriented discourses; private vs collective use discourses; and farming vs new consumption uses discourses. In relation to forestry there were again three axes of contrast: production vs amenity; integration vs segregation with agriculture; and maintaining old rural identity vs framing new rural identity. These findings and axes of differentiation served to frame the design of the conceptual model for the quantitative survey.

The quantitative survey attempts to provide quantitative corroboration of the various rural discourses of different actors in different regions to forests and

aforestation. This comprises by far the longest chapter of the book and examines these discourses in relation to four main areas: the local meaning of rural life; the local significance of forests; and landowners' perspectives and forest management; and opinions about government grants in relation to forestry. It is difficult to do justice to the variety of observations. One or two can be selected at random. First, in general residents in urban areas are more likely to want more forests than those in rural areas in decline. Second, one of the stronger and well-substantiated conclusions (p. 87) is that not all respondents perceive forests as being positive and beneficial. Third, the transformation of the farming community with increased hobby farming ownership is increasing the complexity and range of values amongst farmers, with some antagonistic to forestry and others supportive. Finally, there is strong support for landscape protection and enhancement measures, although there is greater ambivalence about opening forests to recreationists via subsidy schemes.

The conclusions are broken into two types, namely research findings and policy implications. As the first have already been touched on, the second will be considered further. Forests are no longer perceived as last frontiers to be opened to cultivation but increasingly as components of green infrastructure in which urban lifestyles make new demands on forests as playgrounds and landscape features. It is argued that the policy discourse needs to accommodate these changes and adjust from a primary use modernisation agenda to one based more on consumption and amenity uses. Forests do not occupy a pivotal role in rural development, but they can provide a symbol of environmental well-being and contribute substantially to rural identity. In general, production values are not seen as especially important. All-in-all, the argument is made that it would be desirable to move from a sectoral approach to a quality of life approach in which social and environmental values are nurtured to a greater extent and the locality-specific values can be incorporated into forestry policies and practices.

As a UK reviewer, it is heartening to see some of the UK initiatives such as peri-urban forestry vindicated in a wider study. It is also easy to agree with the view that new styles of forest management, rather than new forestry, often have the capacity to enhance the value of forestry to rural residents, but that the public good – private good interfaces of forestry remain complex and negotiable.

In a book written by authors using English as a second language there are inevitably a number of errors in English (e.g. 'cloud' for clout; 'site' for side) and it is not always an easy read. Some of the text is rather dense and it is a challenge for the reader to make the connections between different parts of the work.

This small book offers some sharp and useful insights but it also leaves some problems unresolved. Given the emergent nature of landownership and the positional good status of forest property or residential property adjacent to forests, there are likely to be highly contentious debates in at least some countries over how the widely acknowledged public goods of forestry are best delivered. The implied rights (assumed in this study) of the new rural residents to steer forestry practices in a way that might better meet their privileged aspirations might create a countryside in which a new elite do their utmost to keep valued forest resources for themselves, even when they have no formal property rights over the resource. Herein lies a recipe for future conflict and contestation.

This reviewer is also somewhat sceptical of a book that purports to inform rural development but is largely devoid of economic analysis and values. The social and

cultural elements that are the focus of this text are certainly relevant, but these judgements and values are products of an economic environment and are likely to interact with it in ways that shape, and over time modify, the prevailing discourses of different citizens. Without needing to assert the primacy of economics, there is a case for it figuring more prominently in such a book.

All-in-all, this is a useful addition to the literature on social dimensions of policy in relation to rural development in developed countries. It is recommended reading insofar as it opens the average forest scientist's eyes to a range of techniques they may well have not deployed. These techniques undoubtedly help to throw light on how multifunctional forestry is viewed as contributing to rural development in different places and by different people.

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